

Snowshoers: Please stay on the designated snowshoe trail only! No dogs or snowmobiles are allowed on the Silvercrest Trail System.

Silver Crest Winter Trails

Lewis & Clark National Forest

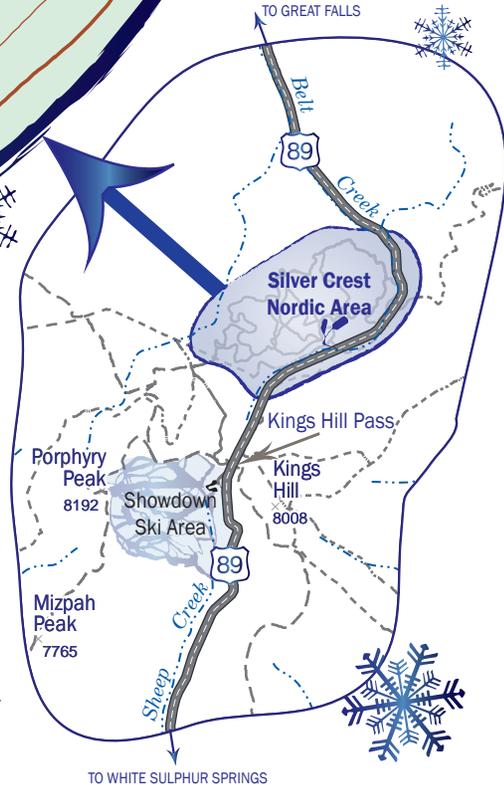


December 2011



- Snowshoe Trail
- Groomed XC Ski Trail
- Ungroomed Nordic Trail
- Snowmobile Trail

Silver Crest Ski and Snowshoe Trails are maintained and managed in partnership between the Silver Crest Trail Association, the Kings Hill Grooming Association and the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Go to <http://silvercresttrails.wordpress.com/> for grooming information





Cross Country Skiing

The Little Belt Mountains provide a multitude of groomed and ungroomed cross country ski routes. In addition, there are hundreds of thousands of acres in the Little Belts Mountains available for back country experiences. Snow depths near Kings Hill Pass average 50-70 inches annually, and the ski season in higher elevations can run from November through May.

Using Ski Trails: Use of groomed and ungroomed trails is free to the public.

Trail Etiquette: It is each skier's duty to ski responsibly, under control, and with consideration for others. Be courteous - You may encounter skiers of different abilities along the trails. Ski under control, be able to stop at any time. Pass on the left if overtaking a slower skier, giving audible signals when passing. Don't block the trail. Travel the right direction on one-way trails. On two-way trails be watchful for oncoming skiers, particularly on uphill and downhill sections or where visibility is limited.

Silver Crest Ski Trails

Silver Crest Ski Area - Groomed

Silver Crest Loop B	2.2 miles
Silver Crest Loop C	4.0 miles
Silver Crest Loop D	5.0 miles
Silver Crest Loop E	1.2 miles

Only skis are allowed on groomed routes!

In order to keep the groomed surfaces in good condition for skiing, no snowshoes, dogs, dog sleds, or other forms of over-the-snow transportation are allowed on Silver Crest Trails.



Snowshoeing

The Little Belt Mountains have many areas for all skill levels of snowshoeing, both on and off trail. Snowshoeing can be an excellent and inexpensive way to see wildlife, get exercise, and enjoy the winter outdoors for any age of user.

Snowshoe Etiquette: Snowshoeing is not allowed on the groomed Silver Crest Ski trails. When snowshoeing along trails where there are also cross-country skiers, protect the ski tracks when possible by walking adjacent to them. On snowmobile routes, wear highly visible clothing, stay aware of snowmobiles and yield to them. Be courteous of all other users along your route.

Need snowshoes? The Lewis and Clark National Forest has a limited number of snowshoes in various sizes that can be checked out with no charge for three days. They are available at the Supervisor's Office (1101 15th Street North, Great Falls) and at Belt Creek Ranger Station north of Neihart on Highway 89.

Group Hikes: Contact the Montana Wilderness Association about their winter snowshoe hikes (with equipment provided).

Silver Crest Snowshoe Loops

The Forest Service has recently designated two snowshoe loops inside the Silver Crest Cross Country Ski Area. The trails are marked with red diamonds to distinguish it from the cross country trails. *The future success of this trail depends on snowshoers respecting the groomed cross country ski trails and staying on the snowshoe trails.* The short loop is about 1/3 mile long, and the long loop is about 1 1/4 mile long.

Other Cross Country Ski & Snowshoe Opportunities in the Kings Hill Area

Ungroomed, Marked Ski Trails

O'Brien Creek Trail

7 miles - Moderately Difficult

Starts at Kings Hill Pass on Highway 89, and traverses the O'Brien Creek drainage to its end in Neihart. A car shuttle is required to ski this trail one-way. Watch for snowmobiles on the lower portion of the trail - wear bright clothing and make yourself visible.

Ranch Creek Trail

10 miles - Difficult

Starts at Kings Hill Pass on Highway 89, climbing Porphyry Peak to the ridge, and then follows Mizpah Ridge, making several steep runs before entering clearings above Mizpah Bowl. Stay on the Trail - Mizpah Bowl is avalanche-prone. The trail proceeds to the head of Ranch Creek, and then drops into Ranch Creek, following a logging road out to Highway 89. A car shuttle is required to ski this trail one-way. Watch for snowmobiles on the lower portion of the trail - wear bright clothing and make yourself visible.

Deadman Ridge Trail

7 miles - Difficult

Starts at Kings Hill Pass on Highway 89, following a logging road behind Kings Hill Cabin to Deadman Ridge, along which it proceeds south until it drops into Deadman Creek and reaches the highway. The lower portion of the route is not completely marked, and skiers should travel with someone familiar with the route. A car shuttle is required to ski this trail one-way.

Other Recommended Places

Jefferson Creek Road 267 - Beginner

60 miles south of Great Falls on Highway 89. This road and area are closed to motorized vehicles in the winter and offer ungroomed opportunities for beginner cross country skiers and snowshoers. The trail is a gentle hike along Jefferson Creek road, ending in an open meadow. The round-trip is approximately 8 miles, but users can turn around at any point and shorten their trip.

Crawford Creek - More Difficult

This moderate trail starts behind the Belt Creek Ranger Station and crosses back and forth across the creek as it climbs approximately 2 miles west. Please leave gates as you find them, and do not cross the private land at the top of the trail without permission.

Memorial Falls - Beginner

60 miles south of Great Falls on Highway 89, this is a short 1/2 mile hike to a picturesque waterfall. The Memorial Falls Trailhead might not be plowed; in this case, park at the Jefferson Creek Road parking area 1/2 mile south of Memorial Falls Trailhead.



Sledding

Remember some basic safety rules when you are out sledding: Don't sled head first - sit up on the sled. Wear recommended safety equipment. Sled in areas free of posts, trees, and fences - all of which may be hidden by deep snow. Don't sled in areas where the slope ends on a road or parking lot, or on a pond or other frozen water. Layer clothes and keep warm and dry!

Please do not sled on or across snowmobile trails!

General Winter Safety

Plan your route before you go and stick to it. Let someone know where you are, and when you plan to be back.

Thin Ice: Do not cross frozen water unless you are certain of it's safety. Moving water bodies do not freeze as thickly or consistently as lakes and ponds. Consider all ice to be a hazard.

Hidden Obstacles: Downed timber, barbed wire, uneven terrain, holes, and other obstacles can be hidden under snow. Travel carefully!

Cold Weather Injury: Frostbite and hypothermia are common risks when travelling in cold weather and when wet. Dress appropriately for the conditions, keep appendages covered, and be aware of changing conditions. Carry emergency equipment including fire-starting tools, an emergency blanket, dry socks, extra food, water and extra layers of clothing. Wear a base and middle layer with a water resistant-breathable outer layer, and don't wear cotton. Use waterproof gaiters and waterproof boots. Stay well hydrated.

Getting Lost: In good weather and on shorter trips, you can generally follow your tracks back to your vehicle. However, in even light snow and wind your tracks can be quickly covered. GPS batteries die, and in certain areas of the mountains satellites are not easily fixed on. Carry a map and compass and know how to use them, even when you have a GPS unit.

Wildlife: Skiing and snowshoeing can be a great way to view winter wildlife. Respect animals and keep your distance.

Snowmobiles and Other Vehicles: When skiing or snowshoeing in areas shared with motor vehicles, wear bright, highly visible clothing, and be aware of the vehicles around you.

Avalanche Safety & Awareness

What conditions are needed for an avalanche to happen?

♦ **Terrain:** The slope must be steeper than about 30 degrees and most often steeper than about 35 degrees. Slopes less than about 30 degrees are generally not steep enough to avalanche.

♦ **Snow pack:** The snow must be unstable. Mountain snow packs are a series of layers stacked on top of one another. Some of the layers are hard and strong, some of them are soft and weak. The snow pack is unstable when a harder stronger layer sets on top of a softer weaker layer and the soft weak layer can barely support the hard strong layer above it.

♦ **Trigger:** A trigger provides the stress that causes the weak layer to collapse and the snow pack to avalanche. A trigger could be additional weight from more snow or it could be you.

Be Informed, Be Trained!

The **Forest Service National Avalanche Center** web site has online avalanche awareness & skills training: <http://www.fsavalanche.org/> The **Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center** in Bozeman offers classes and more local condition information: <http://www.mtavalanche.com/>

What are the RED FLAGS of unstable snow pack

♦ **Recent avalanche activity** is the indisputable sign of instability. If you see recent avalanche activity the snow pack is unstable.

♦ **Wind** creates dangerous slabs; if the wind is blowing or has blown recently it has probably created dangerous wind slabs and increased the avalanche danger.

♦ **Precipitation** - The more snow that falls and the faster it falls the more apt it is to create dangerous conditions.

♦ **Cracks in the snow surface** and/or "whooping" sounds mean that a weak layer is collapsing and that the snow pack is unstable. Stay on low angle slopes.

♦ **Rising temperature** - If the temperature is rising; watch out! Rapid warming can transform fluffy powder into a dangerous slab with